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UNION POST

PUBLISHED IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE IRISH CONGRESS OF TRADE UNIONS



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**STAND UP
AND BE
COUNTED**

**NATIONAL DAY
OF ACTION
NOV 6**

► **CONGRESS ISSUES PLAN FOR NATIONAL RECOVERY** PAGES 2,3,4,5



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for a better, fairer way

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THERE IS **STILL** A CONGRESS 10 POINT PLAN

BETTER FAIRER WAY FOR NATIONAL RECOVERY

I. Parameters for Budget 2010

A COUNTRY is not simply an economy, society matters too. That is why the solutions offered by economists trained in the neo-classical tradition are inappropriate. The problem is that because so many people in important positions are from this background it promotes a kind of establishment 'group think' which is not capable of looking at the problem other than from one perspective.

Congress sees this crisis as a political economy challenge of the first order. It is this political economy perspective which causes us to think about the problem differently and we see that extending the parameters up to Budget 2016 in a more flexible matrix and offers the best chance of a workable solution.

The response of most Governments to the global recession is to try to compensate for a decline in private sector activity by means of a public stimulus and increased state spending. Because of the unique failure of the banking-developer nexus, and the imprudent reliance on property-related transaction taxes, a large segment of our tax base has evaporated. Thus we have not reacted with a stimulus in response to unemployment as other countries have. In fact, policy is focussed almost solely on reducing the public sector.

From recent discussions it is clear that these problems are viewed through different prisms by Government and Congress. In a nutshell the Government intends to cut €4 billion from public expenditure in the forthcoming budget. This is a major policy change since April, when the stated intention was to achieve this adjustment through a combination of tax increases and expenditure cuts. The intention is also to restore public borrowing to a level of 3 percent of GDP by 2013. This is highly unrealistic and potentially catastrophic. It runs the risk of imparting a severe deflationary shock to the economy which could precipitate a prolonged slump, as happened in Japan during the 'lost decade' of the 1990s.

There is an alternative which will not prevent pain and hardship, but it is better and fairer.

There is no iron rule which says that the adjustment has to be completed by 2013. Whatever other problems Ireland has, it has at least entered this recession with the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio in Europe. Gross debt as a % of GDP is forecast to rise to 61.9 in 2009[2].

The Bruegel Group, a centre right policy body, recently published a paper [3] forecasting that the average debt-to-GDP ratio in the EU would rise to 90 percent and that several countries would exceed that. So we have some headroom to temporarily increase borrowing. The Bruegel paper suggests the desirability of a coordinated EU ef-

THE challenge facing the country at this time is unprecedented. No other Government has asked its people for, or has achieved, the level of austerity being considered for the forthcoming budget. As the National Economic and Social Council [1] has pointed out in a recent report, there are five component parts to the crisis – economic, fiscal, social banking sector and reputational – which require an integrated response. They cannot be effectively dealt with in a sequential or partial way. Our concern is that the current stance of public policy fails to grasp the importance of this.

It risks increasing inequality in society and casting the economy into a prolonged slump. Neither does it seem to appreciate that what is happening in the world is the collapse of an economic model which has dominated for 30 years. What we are facing is much more complex than simply accepting a short sharp and painful correction on the road to recovery. There will be no return to 'business as usual'.

That is why Congress is advocating for a better fairer way of confronting this crisis. What this means in practice is explained in the following pages.

fort to get the average figure down to 75 percent again by 2020. This is an even longer timescale than we would suggest.

But it is instructive to look at how Britain is handling a similar challenge, although larger in scope because they have to achieve an adjustment of £100 billion. Current treasury policy is to make the adjustment over eight years. Both The Economist [4] and The Financial Times [5] have opined that fiscal tightening (cuts) should not begin until the economy has started to recover.

This is the context in which we have proposed elongating our adjustment period until 2017. To force a quicker pace runs the risk of not just collapsing public service provision in key areas, but of collapsing the economy.

The Government is playing for very high stakes here, and they are playing with our chips!

The Better Fairer Way also involves progressive taxation. It is believed there is currently €1.8 billion out there in uncollected taxes.

Moreover the huge windfall gains made during the boom cannot all have evaporated. It stretches credulity to suggest that they have.

The reason we need to stretch out the adjustment period to 2017 and to temporarily increase further our debt-to-GDP ratio in the interim, is to create the space for ourselves to engage with the crushing social problems of unemployment, home repossessions and the collapse of private sector pensions.

Almost 450,000 people are now on the live register and although the rate of increase has moderated somewhat there is a danger of many people drifting in to long term unemployment. In addition the construction industry, which directly or indirectly employed 400,000 people at its peak, is in rapid decline. While construction cannot and should not again assume the same share of economic activity it cannot be left to just wither away. Apart from the social consequences of so doing it would mean the loss of capacity to undertake infrastructural projects at a time when

Ireland is still seriously deficient in critical infrastructure. This deficiency undermines competitiveness in the economy.

2. Tackling the Jobs Crisis

WE NEED strategies to keep people in jobs and to get people who have fallen out of the labour market back into employment again – both in their interest and in the national interest. This is what Congress is specifically proposing:

- A €1 billion fund to promote the type of job sharing initiative pioneered successfully in Germany, other EU countries and even Singapore. The model involves an intervention by Government, not to pay social welfare, but to fill the gap with education and training where trading conditions force a company to reduce production. Instead of redundancies reduced working time for everyone is adopted as an alternative.

If, for example, the company moves to a three-day week then the state intervenes to use the other two days to upskill the workforce. There are no distortionary effects because the company still only has three days of production and is not advantaged over its competitors. But the workers are still paying taxes, have preserved their spending power and, when the company gets back on its feet it will not alone have retained its skilled workforce but the human capital component of the enterprise will have increased.

The German Government has 1.4 million people in this scheme. The 20 European countries which have introduced this type of work sharing scheme have seen tangible benefits from it. Unemployment in Europe has risen far less than in the US (which does not intervene in this way). European economies have curbed the social cost of the recession.

And by shoring up domestic demand they have arguably helped their own economies recover as well as contributing to global stabilisation. Mr Stefano Scarpetta, head of OECD Employment



Analysis is quoted as saying that these schemes represent a good use of public money [6]

- Congress has proposed the concept of a National Recovery Bond to fund specific infrastructural projects with the objective of meeting a national need and providing construction employment. This is something that people would see as worth investing in as a patriotic endeavour. It could be marketed at home and amongst the Diaspora. The Construction Industry Council has separately advanced a proposal to utilise pension fund investments for the same purpose. Some combination of these proposals could give the stimulus needed. Importantly for Government it could be done off balance sheet and would not affect our debt to GDP ratio;

- The creation of a model of apprenticeship for the times we live in. This involves using the data available on future skills needs to equip people for the jobs which will be available in the future. This applies equally to matching high level skills to needs and opportunities. There are many countries in Europe, even in recession, which cannot fill jobs in key industries because of skill shortages; Introduce a training guarantee for young people and other workers whose skills are obsolete and people with low educational attainment. In short we need to re-find the capacity that was developed in the early 1990s for labour market interventions and upgrade it for current circumstances;

- We need to look at America and other countries for best practice models on how to create a green industry. The ESB and BGE are already into this area but it needs a strong push from Government to ensure that the potential for green jobs is pushed to its limit;

- The resources and remit for the state agencies responsible for industrial activity – IDA, Enterprise Ireland, ForFas and FAS – should be examined and refocused for best employment outcomes. The fact that some of the commercial state companies are giving a lead in job creation

initiatives suggests that more might be possible with a coherent whole of Government effort;

- Rigidities in the Social Welfare Code which prevent people from accessing supports unless they are unemployed as distinct from underemployed need to be removed. The concept of 'tailored universalism' advocated by NES [7] could be a valuable route to explore here.

3. The Dangerous Myopia of the Deflationary Mindset

CUTTING incomes across the board in a recession makes no sense. It is unfair as well as being economic folly. Lower and middle income earners – much less those on social welfare – played no role in causing this crisis and cannot glibly be asked to pick up the tab with the oft stated mantra 'there is no other way'.

Much of the received wisdom peddled by the neo-classical school of economists has in any event been erroneous. They assumed that wage reductions in the private sector were widespread and advocated that the same should happen in the public sector in the interest of competitiveness. When the data did not support this analysis they questioned the data.

The basic thesis behind this thinking is that Ireland's path out of recession is to boost exports. The normal instrument to achieve this would be to devalue the currency. But because we are member of the Eurozone this is not an option. So the alternative posited is to have a competitive devaluation of wages across the board.

The problem is that none of the people who propose this can give any assurance that it will work. The strongest case the ESRI could make was that it 'could' work [8].

The truth is that Irish exports have held up well in a global market where trade has diminished by a quarter. It is hard to see where the bounce in exports is to come from in these circumstances.

On the other hand we do know that the reduc-

tion in GDP experienced so far has come entirely from a collapse in domestic demand, the slump investment being compounded by the cuts in the volume of public net current expenditure already taking place and even more so by the sharp fall in the volume of private consumer expenditure. If incomes are cut it will exacerbate this trend in domestic demand decline potentially driving us into the type of slump Japan experienced over 10 years in the 1990s.

Moreover, it is a reality that some aspects of domestic costs, and hence competitiveness, are artificially kept high by public policy. In pursuit of competition, so called, ESB is not allowed, as the dominant provider of electricity, to reduce its prices. The effect of the NAMA legislation will be to underpin property rents. Leaving aside the efficacy of the wage cutting argument discussed above, why should the burden of adjustment be borne by wages if other economic costs are being artificially propped up?

As a medium term strategy to increase competitiveness there may be a case for wage moderation in combination with policies to control other costs and improve the factors which influence competitiveness such as infrastructure. But there are trade offs here and even wage moderation in a recession is deflationary. An accord reconciling medium term unit wage cost trends with competitor countries would be far more beneficial than pursuing deflationary wage cuts now.

The aspect of this issue which is hardest to fathom is that some of the advocates of wage cuts, like the ESRI, acknowledge that they will cause more deflation.

If there is less spending there will be more people out of work. That means less tax revenue and more people dependent on social welfare. What does Government do then, impose more cuts?

4. Protecting Vital Services

WITH more people out of work – 200,000 since 2007 – there is increased pressure on public service provision.

To cut service provision now makes no sense and could, in the longer-term, fatally undermine vital services such as health and education. It is arguable that our health service has never recovered from the corrosive effect of the savage cuts imposed in 1980s, when hundreds of beds were taken out of the system. It is likely that if cuts of that order were to be imposed again, it could simply collapse our vital services.

There are huge social policy implications to this. The level of suffering that will be experienced by the most vulnerable in the community if €1.3 billion is cut in Budget 2010 will be traumatic. This is not to suggest that more efficiency



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CONGRESS 10 POINT PLAN FOR NATIONAL RECOVERY

and better outcomes should not be an objective. Nor does it mean that expenditure cuts can be entirely avoided.

In any debate about what is to be done it can be seen that there are four variables available to Government, viz: to cut expenditure, to raise tax revenue, to elongate the adjustment period and to borrow more money on a temporary basis. The challenge is to ensure that these are calibrated in a way that the best off people make the biggest contribution and the least harm is done to the fabric of society.

5. Protecting Peoples' Homes

THE Government needs to look out for the needs of ordinary working families. It's not enough to save the banks, working families need to be thrown a life line too. Working families who have lost their jobs and incomes must be protected from threats of repossession and they must be provided with realistic ways to deal with their over indebtedness.

It is unfair that the tax payer is funding NAMA, while at the same time ordinary working families are under threat of losing their home.

With the dramatic growth in over indebtedness and the increasing number of families with mortgage arrears and other debts it is imperative that Ireland puts in place fair and appropriate laws to deal with the casualties of this crisis.

Congress is calling on Government to take immediate action and use the draft NAMA legislation to protect households in the current economic crisis. Action has to be taken in this legislation because:

- The threat of repossession is now very real for families, many of whom lost their jobs towards the end of 2008 and early 2009, as the 12 month moratorium on repossession of homes in the Financial Regulators Mortgage Arrears Code, and income protection insurance, is for thousand of families, now running out;

- The political influence currently exerted on the banks to hold them back from repossessing ordinary family homes is likely to become ineffective once NAMA has taken over the banks' toxic assets;

- At that point banks will be tempted to repossess houses as they have nothing to lose, as despite the repossession, the person still owes the full cost of the mortgage (and the banks will also charge the families unrestricted fees for the cost of repossession, sale and court costs!), and in addition lenders will pursue the borrower for the outstanding amount;

- Voluntary surrender, where homeowners hand the keys of their property back to the bank, is on the increase. Where the property is in negative equity, there are real issues facing families as inevitably the lender will pursue the borrower for the shortfall and there is no guarantee about how the property will be valued nor is there any obligation on the banks to obtain the best price for the property.

Congress believes that every person who finds themselves in a situation of severe indebtedness must be given a period of up to three years, free

from any legal threat, to sort out their problem provided they comply with the protocol set out hereunder.

The NAMA legislation should be used to introduce this new regime for dealing with indebtedness including the establishment of an Office of Indebtedness. Specifically, this involves:

- Establishing an office for indebtedness to provide for an easily accessible alternative to courts for people who are over indebted;

- Where families are in difficulty, require all of their lenders to conclude at least for the period of the recession, an 'affordable mortgage and debt payment arrangement' which protects a 'minimally adequate' standard of living;

- In repossession and surrender situations, allow the office of indebtedness/courts to take into account the lending practices of the banks, and where loans can be shown to have been recklessly provided, for the Office/Court to vary the overall mortgage and or the repayments and to suspend interest and other charges and penalties as these only exacerbate a family's financial distress;

- NAMA valuations to extend to family homes and in addition set out what steps should be taken by a lender to ensure that the best price is obtained for a family home when it is repossessed;

- Restrict the amount that can be charged in a repossession/voluntary surrender situation, restrict fees, cap resale costs, and more importantly include an option of a write down of negative equity;

- Debtors must be guaranteed access and representation by MABs personnel when they are negotiating the 'affordable mortgage and debt payment arrangement';

- Provide for certainty, no more vague and ambiguous language in Voluntary Codes which make enforcement or even the investigation of alleged breaches by Lenders, very difficult.

6. A Fair Contribution from the Wealthy

AN EXTRAORDINARY effort has been made in recent times to claim that all wealth in the country has evaporated.

This is clearly designed to ensure that a popular demand for higher tax levels on this cohort of the population can be seen off.

Nevertheless it is a matter of public record that €1.8 billion in taxes remains uncollected.

We know that the top one per cent of the population made about €75 billion during the boom era. Specifically, it can be computed from revenue data that a minimum of €66 billion was made by individuals between 2002 and 2008 – almost €10 billion a year[9].

The top one per cent in 2007 held 20 per cent of the wealth, the top two per cent held 30 per cent and the top five per cent held 40 per cent. How can this money have disappeared because for every developer who paid over the odds for land there had to be an owner who received the money.

7. A National Sustainable Pensions System

THE RECESSION and the attendant crisis of global capitalism have wrecked havoc with personal and occupational pensions. Many people from all walks of society are now at risk of facing an old age in poverty because their pension will not provide what they expected, or perhaps nothing at all.

Unlike most EU countries Ireland relied heavily on private pensions. It is clear that this position is not now sustainable. A new pension's strategy has been promised for years but has not been delivered.

An essential trade off for people enduring a painful economic adjustment would be a social dividend in the future. The pensions crisis is as systemically important in a social sense as the banking crisis is in an economic sense.

Comprehensive proposals for pension reform have been presented to Government by Congress over the last five years. It is not unreasonable to expect Government to either accept these proposals or to publish its own strategy for dealing with the problem.

The immediate crisis with occupational pension schemes requires attention. The majority of Defined Benefit Schemes are in difficulty with some high profile cases in which people on the eve of retirement lost everything. Earlier discussions with Government in relation to pensions protection in double insolvency situations, or where a solvent employer moves away, must be brought to a conclusion at realistic levels which dovetail with ECJ jurisprudence. The continuing scandal whereby people who have to buy an insurance annuity are being ripped off to the tune of 20 per cent of the fund's value should be ended by the state providing annuities via the NTMA or other appropriate agency.

8. Social Welfare Rates

CONGRESS believes that there should be a threshold of decency below which society should not go in a crisis. Cutting social welfare rates falls into that category.

Beyond the issue of social justice involved there is also the consideration that money spent on social welfare is, of necessity, all spent in the local economy. It therefore contributes directly to the maintenance of jobs.

9. Reform of the Banking System

CONGRESS has serious misgivings about the NAMA legislation relating to the estimated default rate on loans and whether the property market has yet reached its trough. It is possible that an enormous liability is being foisted on future generations. The reality is that the legislation will go through the Oireachtas and the question then will be about the longer term future of the sector. It is important that bank structures are reformed in a way that prevents a similar crisis happening ever again. But in doing this bank employees must not be scapegoated.

10. Workplace Rights

THE onset of recession has exposed a pattern of behaviour amongst some employers which, in its vindictiveness and exploitation, is redolent of the early part of the last century. Society should not allow the alteration in the balance of power between labour and business in a recession to facilitate such conduct.

The Government has committed itself to nine separate pieces of legislation over recent years which would, if enacted, go some way to restoring civilised behaviour in the workplace. Congress demands that these commitments be honoured.

With the adoption by the EU of the Lisbon Treaty the Charter of Fundamental Rights will acquire the status of primary laws. Article 28 provides for a legal entitlement to collective bargaining. The Lisbon Treaty also provides for Europe's accession to the European Convention on Human Rights. There is now a clear cut jurisprudence based on Article 11 of the convention in favour of the right to collective bargaining.

These developments at international level mean that the Irish Government cannot credibly continue to deny its citizens a basic human right enjoyed by every other citizen of the EU. It no longer has any legal excuse to delay introducing the necessary legislation to allow collective bargaining as of right.

[1] NESC Paper 120 (2009) Next Steps in Addressing Ireland's Five-Part Crisis: Combating Retrenchment with Reform
[2] The net debt to GDP ratio in 2007 was 12.2 per cent. This is net of NPRF, social insurance and Exchequer balances (source: ESRI Quarterly Economic Commentary, Table 7)
[3] Von Hagen, Jurgen et al (2009) Exit: Time to Plan: Paper prepared for presentation to the informal Ecofin Council, Göteborg, 1st October, 2009. The Bruegel Group
[4] The Economist, 26th September, 2009 'Deflating the State', P. 28
[5] Wolf, Martin (2009) 'Britain's Phoney Debate on Slashing Spending', The Financial Times, October 9, 2009, P. 17
[6] Atkins, Ralph (2009) 'Eurozone Feels Benefit of Short-Time Work Schemes' The Financial Times, 29th October, 2009, P. 6
[7] NESC Paper No. 113 (2005) The Developmental Welfare State
[8] Barrett, Alan et al (2009) Quarterly Economic Commentary, ESRI Autumn, 2009
[9] This figure is based on the Revenue Capital Gains Tax Returns

NATIONAL DAY OF ACTION ALL PROTESTS START NOVEMBER 6 at 2.30pm

DUBLIN Parnell Square
WATERFORD The Glen
TULLAMORE County Hall
CORK Connolly Hall
LIMERICK Mechanics Institute
GALWAY The Cathedral
SLIGO The Blue Lagoon
DUNDALK The Fairgreen

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WE'RE HERE TO KEEP YOU POSTED

INO: Vote Yes to protest cuts

IRISH Nurses Organisation chief Liam Doran has urged nurses and midwives to vote for industrial action to protest against proposed further wage cuts in the public sector.

In a message to members, the union's leadership said it was reaffirming its call for a Yes vote in the ballot following recent comments by Taoiseach Brian Cowen and Finance Minister Brian Lenihan. They have signalled a cut of €1.3bn in the public sector pay bill next year.

Mr Doran claimed this suggested a further seven per cent cut in public sector salaries was on the agenda on top of the 7.5 per cent levy cut imposed last April.

He told INO members: "In view of all of this, you are again asked to familiarise yourself with the voting arrangements, in your workplace, and to cast your vote in favour of industrial action.

"This will allow the INO, in partnership with other public sector unions, to oppose the Government's proposals which are unfair, unjust and unwarranted."

POA: Govt is in breach of deal

THE PRISON Officers Association is balloting its members on taking industrial action following what it was claimed was the Government's breaching of the social partnership agreement.

Deputy general secretary Eugene Dennehy slammed the recommendation contained in the recent McCarthy Report that €15m could be saved by cutting pay and allowances in the Prison Service. He said: "It is of immense concern to prison officers and their families that this proposal seems to have the support of government.

"We can't take such a threat lightly - and it is for all of these reasons that we are running this ballot on industrial action. Our members have paid a heavy price already by way of easing the economic burden. Many prison officers now have a reduction in their pay of more than €4,000 a year."



THE 24/7 Frontline Alliance has given its backing to Congress' November 6 protests. Alliance chairperson Des Kavanagh said: "We fully support the protests and all our affiliates will be taking part, including those organisations such as my own, the Psychiatric Nurses Association, which are not members of Congress. It is important all working people who pay their taxes through the PAYE system support the Congress campaign. The PAYE sector is already shouldering more than its fair share while the bankers, developers and others who wrecked our economy are seeking to divert attention from their own need to contribute by fomenting a divide between public and private sector workers."

NIC-ICTU message to NI Executive:

NORTH

THE Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions has called on working people in Northern Ireland to protest against further cuts in public services and to show their support for policies that protect and create jobs.

A series of protest rallies will be held on Friday, November 6 at 10 locations across the North. Congress assistant general secretary Peter Bunting claimed reports the US economy seemed to be pulling out of recession "ought to be a lesson for those responsible for economic policy here".

He said: "The US economy is improving because of President Obama's stimulus package. Likewise, the improvements in the German and French economies are down to prudent use of a public sector-led response to the downturn. Stimulus policies work.

"In contrast, the economy in the Republic of Ireland is stuck in a vicious downward cycle of cuts and falling demand and more cuts.

"The ICTU and others are calling for policies which stimulate growth and protect jobs.

"We in Northern Ireland and the UK cannot make the same mistakes which Brian Cowan and Brian Lenihan have made.

"We should plan, stimulate and innovate to protect and develop our economy.

"The ICTU is organising a series of rallies in the Republic to stop the crisis there getting completely out of control.

"The Northern Ireland Committee of the ICTU is organising simultaneous rallies to prevent us facing the same crisis in 12 or 18 months time." Mr Bunting pointed out the Northern Ireland Executive Budget for 2008/2011 had introduced cuts of £1.604bn across all departments. He added: "The Executive is now planning for in excess of £370m in cuts before the end of the current financial year.



Peter Bunting: 'Show your opposition'

"In the Belfast Trust alone this will mean an extra cut in the order of £25m and the closure of 150 beds in the two largest hospitals in Belfast.

"The threat of additional water charges has been raised again. All of these cuts will disproportionately affect working families and the disadvantaged, and all users of public services.

"Now is the time to make known the public opposition to these cuts in services and the loss of jobs in the private sector.

"Join with the trade unions in showing your opposition to the cuts. Rally with us on November 6."

Don't follow policies of Cowen & Co

RALLIES

A BETTER, FAIRER DEAL FOR NORTHERN IRELAND FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 6 at 1pm

- BELFAST** City Hall
 - L'DERRY** Custom House Street (Guild Hall)
 - ARMAGH** Market Street
 - BALLYMENA** Band Stand, Broadway
 - CRAIGAVON** Area Hospital
 - COLERAINE** Causeway Hospital
 - ENNISKILLEN** Erne Hospital
 - MAGHERAFELT** Diamond
 - NEWRY** Old Town Hall
 - OMAGH** Court House
- Marches to Belfast Rally from Mater, Royal & City Hospitals (Form up at 12 noon, march at 12.30pm)*

SIPTU tribute to Coca Cola strikers after long dispute

SIPTU divisional organiser Gerry McCormack has paid tribute to the "unstinting resolve" of Coca Cola workers following the end of a nine-week dispute.

Settlement proposals provide for substantially improved redundancy terms from those previously offered by the company.

The dispute arose after Coca Cola HBC Ireland announced it intended to outsource the jobs of 130 distribution and warehouse staff at facilities in Dublin, Waterford, Cork, Tipperary and Galway.

Mr McCormack said: "SIPTU wishes to commend the heroic battle by the workers of Coca Cola HBC and their unstinting resolve to seek a fair and equitable settlement in this most difficult dispute."

He also thanked the Labour Court and mediator Gerry Durcan for help provided in resolving the dispute.

The Court had recommended improved redundancy terms and the possible retention of direct employment at the Ballycoolin depot in Dublin.

Mr McCormack added: "The 130 workers and their colleagues who participated in this dispute fought against great odds and concluded a successful dispute.

"We wish to also thank all of the supporters of the Coca Cola HBC workers, the general public, other trade unions and public representatives for their support over the past nine weeks."



Picture: SIPTU

INTO leaders in ballot call

THE Executive of the INTO has asked primary school teachers to support its call for up to three days industrial action in response to threats to pay, pensions and conditions of employment.

General Secretary Sheila Nunan said it was clear the Government was actively considering further cuts to public sector pay and pensions in the run-up to the Budget on December 9.

She warned if the recommendations contained in the McCarthy Report were implemented, teachers faced longer hours and more work as well as salary cuts amounting to over €50m a year.

Ms Nunan claimed the decision to ballot for industrial action was not taken lightly, adding: "Teachers are fully aware of the economic challenges facing the country and have already incurred a significant reduction in home pay.

"However, the current challenges must not be addressed by placing an unfair and disproportionate burden on public sector workers."

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Picture: Amnesty International

GET ORGANISED

Chomsky delivers people power message at Belfast lecture

NOAM Chomsky has urged people to organise against poverty and warned of the looming menace of the far-right taking advantage of growing inequality.

He made his comments as he delivered the annual Amnesty International Lecture in Belfast on October 30.

Widely recognised as one of the world's leading intellectuals, Prof Chomsky told a packed audience at Queen's University's Whitla Hall that inequality had "soared to unprecedented heights" in the US.

He said: "There is now a mass of people with real grievances, who want answers but are not receiving them."

"The far-right is providing answers that are completely crazy – that rich liberals are giving their hard-earned money away to illegal immi-

grants and the shiftless poor. "A common reaction in elite educated circles and much of the left is to ridicule the right-wing protestors, but that is a serious error."

"The correct reaction is to examine our own failures. The grievances are quite real and should be taken seriously."

DANGERS

Prof Chomsky warned there were "real dangers" in letting these views go answered.

He added: "If the protestors are getting crazy answers from the hardline right-wing extreme, the proper reaction is to provide the right answers, and do something about them."

"An organised public can achieve a great deal, as we see right now in many places."

"In South America, there are at least serious steps to confront poverty and other severe

human rights abuses. The driving force is mass popular movements. They are beginning to address what Amnesty calls 'the unheard truth' – that 'poverty is the world's worst human rights crisis, this generation's greatest struggle'."

Patrick Corrigan, Amnesty International's Northern Ireland programme director, claimed Prof Chomsky's message was "as relevant for people in Belfast as it is for those in Beirut, Baghdad or Beijing".

He added: "We all have a responsibility to stand up for justice and to stand against those who would take away the human rights of the most vulnerable."

"By standing together, through organisations like Amnesty International, ordinary people can make a call for justice which will be heard in all the world's capitals."



OUR FALLEN

CONGRESS assistant general secretary Peter Bunting and Lord Mayor Naomi Long at the unveiling of a memorial fountain dedicated to 30 Belfast City Council employees murdered during the Troubles. Speaking at the October 28 ceremony in the grounds of City Hall where the memorial is sited, Mr Bunting said: "We in the trade union movement remember them as our fallen."

"Remove the 'caste' designations of 'Catholic' and 'Protestant' and you are left with occupations – teacher, taxi driver, homemaker. What they had in common was that they were workers. What made them stronger as workers was this commonality and it is through this commonality that we remember them today."



Tough guys: Company enforcers lay down the law in scene from Matewan

Labour epic highlight of WCTU celebrations

FILM DIRECTOR John Sayles was guest of honour at a special screening of his epic labour movie *Matewan* in Waterford last month.

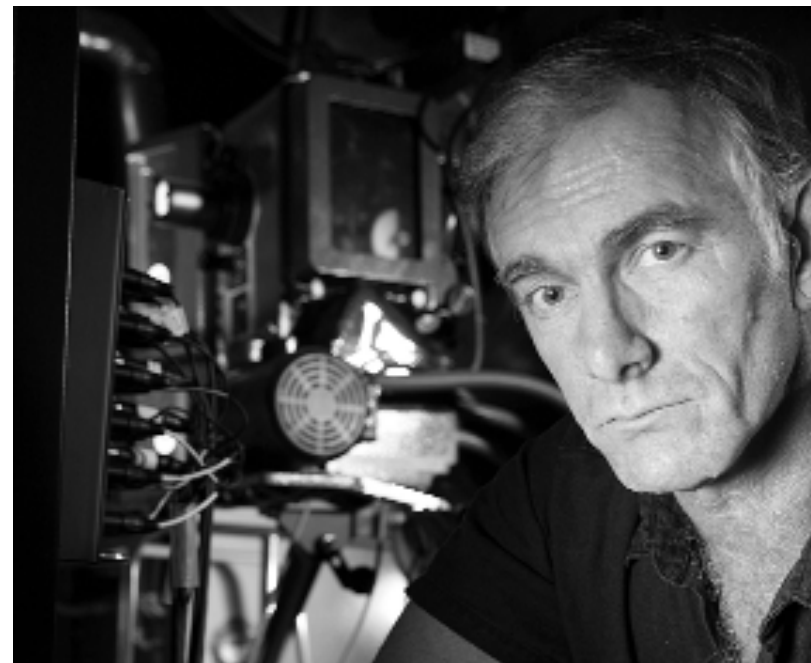
The October 15 event, forming part of Waterford Council on Trade Unions centenary celebrations, was dubbed "a fantastic boost for the trade union movement" by Mayor John Hogan.

The New Jersey-based film maker said he had travelled to Waterford because he recognised the importance of trade unions in the modern world as well as a general belief in solidarity and kinship. He was joined at the event, held at the Garter Lane Arts Centre, by Maggie Renzi who produced the movie.

Matewan is based on a true-life incident when workers from the Stone Mountain Coal Company fought with hired mercenaries from the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency.

It followed an attempt to prevent the workers from unionising. The resulting pitched battle on the streets of *Matewan*, West Virginia on May 19, 1920, left 10 dead.

Hailed as a minor classic on its release in 1987, *Variety* Magazine called it "a heartfelt, straight-ahead tale of labour organising in the coal mines of West Virginia that runs its course like a train coming down the track".



Solidarity forever: John Sayles' *Matewan* is classic of labour cinema

Picture: Bob Marshak, courtesy Anarchists' Convention. Still: John Sayles & Maggie Renzi

ECONOMY

Deflationary approach is straight out of Dickens...

CPSU general secretary Blair Horan has said economists advocating deflationary policies are promoting a return to "19th century solutions".

He pointed out that because Ireland is part of a single EU currency, pay cuts across public and private sectors would inevitably lead to deflation and a real drop in workers' living standards in marked contrast to "the monied classes".

Mr Horan said: "Those with assets would not only have their full values protected in the euro but their value would increase due to deflation."

"A weaker dollar and sterling further enhances asset values in euros. It is like having gold in the bank for the monied classes."

He argued that during the gold standard era of the 19th century, the rich were "similarly protected".

"Their assets were fully convertible to gold, while workers bore the brunt of boom to bust recessions. Deflation economists argue that pay cuts are the best alternative to currency devaluations that took place prior to the euro. This is not true."

DEVALUED

Mr Horan said that in the past when the punt was devalued "nominal values remained unchanged" but that "real values of both incomes and assets reduced" affecting all sections of Irish society.

However, with the euro, pay cuts affect workers and increase their debt obligations while the monied classes "suffer no loss and have the equivalent of gold in the bank".

He added: "This is the 19th century solution advocated by the extreme, neo-liberal economists whose policies caused the crises in the first place."

"The Great Depression banished this thinking for two generations before it returned to almost destroy the Irish economy."

"Why should anybody believe that the neo-liberal economists who caused this crises, have any role to play in finding the solutions?"

"A part of the solution must be a top rate of tax on high earners and a wealth tax on assets... and not pay cuts for lower paid public servants."

€4bn cut not in fiscal plan

CONGRESS President Jack O'Connor has claimed the fiscal plan put forward by the Government – and approved by the European Commission – did not envisage a €4 billion cut in public spending in 2010.

He said: "It envisaged an adjustment in the deficit of €4bn, which is an entirely different thing."

"This was to be achieved by a €1.75bn increase in taxation, a €1.5bn reduction in current expenditure and a €0.75bn reduction in capital expenditure."

"We could not agree with this because, in the absence of parallel means to stimulate economic activity, it would serve only to exacerbate the downward spiral."

"However, the Government has slickly shifted ground so that the €4bn adjustment has now become a €4bn cut in public expenditure."

"The effect is to place the whole burden on working people and on those who depend on public services, whilst the wealthy are insulated from making any additional contribution whatsoever."

CUBA

Embargo like NAMA each year

CUBA Support Group Ireland has hit out at a top US official's claim that the 47-year sanctions policy has not hurt the Cuban people.

It follows a vote at the UN General Assembly on October 28 condemning the economic embargo and calling for it to be lifted.

The non-binding resolution – with 187 votes in favor, three against and two abstentions – reflects global disapproval of Washington's longstanding bid to isolate Havana.

Susan Rice, the US ambassador to the UN, claimed the resolution did not reflect "current realities" on the Caribbean island nation.

She said it was wrong to blame US sanctions for depriving Cubans, adding: "It is high time for this body to move beyond the rhetorical posturing of the past, to recognise the situation in Cuba for what it is today and to encourage progress towards genuine change."

But Cuba Support Group Ireland's national coordinator Simon McGuinness hit back, claiming the embargo was the longest blockade in human history.

He said: "Cuban government documents lodged with the UN show the blockade has cost it \$236bn in today's prices. This is three times the total cost of the Irish government's NAMA bank rescue plan."

"Bad and all as that is, it's not the full picture. Ireland has an income 17 times greater per head than Cuba, so the equivalent blockade would have cost Ireland €12.036bn, or one NAMA every year for the last 51 years."

"I think that reveals the ambassador's comments for what they are."



CUBA Support Group Ireland and the Latin America Solidarity Centre join forces once again to bring you the 13th annual Ché Guevara Pub Quiz fundraiser in the Harcourt Hotel, Dublin on Wednesday, November 18.

Doors open at 7pm with first questions starting at 7.30pm, so don't be late! Teams of four will be charged €40, individuals are welcome and will be formed into teams on the night. There will be lots of spot prizes.

Last year's event was well supported and a full house is anticipated for this year too. It promises to be a fun night out with questions designed to trip up all age groups and all political persuasions equally! For more information call Simon on 087 6785842.

CHOICE IS PAY LATER

'INVEST now or pay later' was the key theme at a special TUI conference held in Dublin last month.

The October 17 event heard economists, employers, academics, trade unionists and teachers argue that investing in education was vital for a number of economic, social and health reasons.

TUI general secretary Peter MacMenamin spoke of the need to secure "a high quality and completely equitable education system for all".

Referring to recent Government cuts, he said that schools and colleges were having to operate with seriously depleted resources at a time of rapidly increasing student numbers.

He added: "We cannot afford not to invest appropriately in our education system at all levels. If we fail to invest now, the economic and social costs to the country will be immeasurable."

Barnardo's chief Fergus Finlay queried whether we cared enough about future generations particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

He told the conference: "Very soon we will start operating a new prison in Ireland called Thornton Hall. In its first decade of operation, Thornton Hall will cost the taxpayer €1bn to run and operate."

"In its second decade, Thornton Hall will be full of kids that we neglected while we were spending that €1bn."

SOCIETY

"If we want to build a society that doesn't need Thornton Hall any more, we should be investing a fraction of that €1bn in early intervention and prevention in the lives of some of our children."

"We know where they live, we know what their circumstances are and what the future holds for them but it seems we'd rather spend €1bn picking up the pieces after the damage has been done rather than spending a fraction of it preventing that damage."

IBEC's Tony Donohoe spoke of the importance of investing in education even during a severe economic downturn.

He said: "Economic return from investment in this area tends to accrue mainly in the medium to long term, but it is vital that we treat it as a priority area for investment, even during this time of acute fiscal stress."

Jackie O'Callaghan, of the National Parents' Association for Vocational Schools and Community Colleges, claimed schools were still "straining" because of cuts. She said changes to the pupil/teacher ratio has resulted in a loss of subjects in many schools and had seriously affected students with special educational needs.

Ms O'Callaghan added: "Typically, it is the poorest families who suffer as a result."

"In many ways referring to money spent on a day-to-day basis on education as 'current' spending is a misnomer. Students represent the future of the country and all spending in education should be looked upon as capital investment."

Kathleen Lynch, who heads up the Equality Studies department at UCD, spoke about inequality in the Irish education system.

Claiming that this inequality was all too often "taken as a given", she said: "We accept as 'educationally inevitable' that students with more economic resources will do better in education than those with fewer resources."

TUI CONFERENCE REPORT



Sally Anne Kinahan and Fergus Finlay

Ms Lynch pointed out that governments allowed "institutionalised injustices in education" to persist over generations.

"The Government expects schools to supplement basic educational services with so-called 'voluntary contributions' that they know poor parents cannot afford and it allows schools for the privileged to charge fees in addition to being funded by the State."

"To create a more equal educational system we need not only to eliminate inherited inequalities that actively promote injustices in access, participation and outcomes within education, we also need to avoid compounding existing injustices with new ones."

INEQUALITIES

"And we need to recognise and own the immorality of inequalities in education that consigns so many students to a sense of failure on leaving school."

Underlining that equality in education was linked with equality in society, Ms Lynch added: "Data from many countries shows that the lower the level of income and wealth inequality, the lower the level of educational inequality in a given society. To claim that one is promoting equality in education without addressing economic injustices is to engage in an act of educational and political delusion."

Congress assistant general secretary Sally Anne Kinahan spoke of how other EU countries had concentrated on investing in education and up-skilling.

She said: "The Government is reducing the prospects of recovery by its failure to introduce effective measures to preserve jobs and protect those most vulnerable to long-term unemployment, particularly workers with low education attainment."

"Congress has consistently pointed to the achievement of countries such as Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands and France, which have intervened to save jobs while at the same time investing in educating and up-skilling workers."

Ms Kinahan added: "Investment in education – from early childhood development to workplace learning – is the most effective panacea to overcome social disadvantage and inequality, improve life chances, employment prospects and earning power."

INVEST NOW OR



Peter MacMenamin, Don Ryan, Dr Emer Smyth and Jackie O'Callaghan were among speakers at last month's conference

Student numbers to rise by third

STUDENT numbers are expected to rise by nearly a third in the next 20 years, according to figures presented at the TUI's Investment in Education conference last month.

The TUI claimed the current system is not equipped to support the most vulnerable students now, and with numbers increasing from 340,000 to 440,000 at secondary level, the situation can only worsen steadily unless interventions are made.

General secretary Peter MacMenamin said: "Demographics show our education system will come under unprecedented pressure, with an increase of at least 5,000 additional students in the system every September for the next 20 years."

"It follows that considerable additional investment in our education system will be necessary to give every child the best possible chance to, at a very minimum, obtain the Leaving Certificate."

He claimed that there was a real risk the already unacceptable drop out rate (20pc nationally, 30pc in Dublin city) would rise substantially unless programmes to support vulnerable chil-

dren were fully funded and enhanced. Mr MacMenamin called for the full restoration of funding to Leaving Certificate Applied and Leaving Certificate Vocational programmes which he said retained the most vulnerable students through alternative learning methods.

He also called for the removal of a moratorium on middle management posts which "undermined the fabric of Irish school life", and the restoration of "appropriate substitution cover" for teachers to allow more experiential learning that requires students to leave the classroom for field trips and extracurricular activities.

Mr MacMenamin said the great increase in secondary level student population would necessarily mean a rise in numbers seeking access to further and higher education.

He called for a significant increase in the number of places available in further education, adequate funding for colleges to maintain staffing levels and a freezing of the college registration fee.

Failure to invest in education would, he added, have "hugely damaging implications" for society

and would mean "we would move no further towards the knowledge economy our politicians talk so often about".

Mr MacMenamin warned also of the social consequences and impact on public health if investment in education was not made.

He said: "Socially, many thousands of young people will fall through some of the gaping cracks in our education system."

"Many could eventually end up in our prison system. The cost of keeping a prisoner in Ireland can be as much as €270,000 per annum."

"A fair, equitable and fully resourced education system creates a fairer society and supports active citizenship."

"Apart from compelling social considerations, it is economic madness to remove the education support which will keep these young people away from this fate."

"There is also a strong and clear correlation between education and health/life expectancy."

"Increasing educational attainment ultimately leads to a decreased healthcare bill."

Batt 'drags heels' on subs issue



Nunan: Solution

INTO general secretary Sheila Nunan has proposed "an immediate solution" to teacher unemployment.

She said the answer lay with Education Minister Batt O'Keeffe and called for panels of unemployed substitute teachers to be taken on by the Department. Schools could then appoint substitutes when needed.

Ms Nunan also accused Mr O'Keeffe of dragging his heels on promised legislation to make sure only qualified teachers were employed in schools.

She said: "The union has publicly urged schools to ensure newly-qualified and recently-qualified teachers are prioritised when it comes

to substitute and temporary work in schools. It is essential unemployed teachers be given every opportunity to gain both classroom experience, and incremental and pension credit, from their service in schools."

As well as axing hundreds of teaching jobs, the INTO has pointed out Mr O'Keeffe has also slashed substitution by a third so there is less temporary work available.

The first day of a teacher's absence is now covered by the other teachers in the school.

Ms Nunan also lashed recent comments by Mr O'Keeffe placing the blame for the situation on schools as "crude attempt to deflect the blame from himself".



O'Keeffe: Axe

MRCI: Govt must act to combat forced labour

MIGRANT Rights Centre Ireland has called on Justice Minister Dermot Ahern to redouble his efforts to combat forced labour in Ireland.

The appeal came as EU Anti-Trafficking Day was marked across Europe on October 19.

Forced labour, as defined by the ILO, happens when people enter work or service against their freedom of choice and cannot leave it without punishment or the threat of punishment.

According to the MRCI, there are no official statistics for workers in this category.

The group is currently assisting 20 people who have been in forced labour situations.

Most worked as domestic workers in private homes, as restaurants workers, agricultural workers and seafarers.

The ILO's Roger Plant has described forced labour as "a growing concern".

Addressing a special conference on the issue organised by the MRCI last month, he said: "Trafficking for sexual exploitation has grabbed most of the attention and headlines in recent times, but trafficking for forced labour is now becoming more recognised and something that we all must combat."

Edel McGinley, a MRCI project leader on forced labour, added: "We continually come across people in situations of forced labour across Ireland and the public knows nothing about it because it is so hidden. There needs to be a concerted effort to recognise and combat this crime in Ireland."

Colombia talks call p16

UNITE: North's jobless figures being 'massaged'

UNITE has queried figures that seem to show Northern Ireland had the smallest monthly rise in the number of people who are unemployed in more than a year.

The union's regional secretary Jimmy Kelly said: "We're unimpressed with the way the Northern Ireland Executive continues to massage the jobless figures."

He claimed the Executive fails to include workers classed as 'economically inactive'.

UNITE estimates this group, numbering 50,000, are still trying to get a job.

If these figures are added then it doubles the number of jobless in Northern Ireland.

Mr Kelly added: "Unite called for a public works programme in August this year to create jobs for the long-term jobless and young people."

"If the Executive wishes to misinform the public of the true unemployment figures and hide behind this serious omission from the statistics, with the claim that it is produced in line with current recommendations and guidelines, then sorting out our financial and economic predicament will remain a long way off."

"We are calling for transparency of the true jobless figures and the cost to the economy."

UNISON regional secretary PATRICIA

It's simple... health care investment saves lives

AN unequal society is bad for everyone, rich and poor alike. Ours is the most unequal in the UK. Our health inequalities are pervasive.

They have been measured and monitored and remain unchanged for the past 10 years.

They have a number of root causes but poverty, unemployment, low pay, educational under-achievement and lack of decent public housing all feature as key factors.

We have reached a critical point in the future of health and social care in Northern Ireland.

We can ignore our health and watch hospital admissions grow out of control or we can do the right thing. Last month we asked our politicians to 'think big'.

Much of what is wrong with the state of public health can be put right by a new direction.

The Executive, Government departments and most public bodies have a role to play.

That is where the big thinking has to start and where each needs to make its resource contribution.

Some of our financial problems are inherited but the current programme for Government and Budget removed money from health, education and housing to prioritise the economic strategy.

That was putting the cart before the horse. At least £1bn was wasted. We know the size of the problem. We have resources, however con-

strained, and most of the work has already been done. There are models of health care delivery which fit a population with our state of health and we can make a remarkable difference within a few years.

Some of the leading clinicians like Darzi who pulled London health out of crisis and practitioners like Prof Richard Wilkinson helped develop the new models.

A simple UNISON proposal in the past is to extend the Nutritional Schools Meals pilot to all children. The long-term benefits in reducing the millions of pounds spent on coronary care and diabetes could put the health service on a sound footing.

COSTED

This requires political co-operation. It needs Education to put money in. It needs Health, Education, children and parents to work together. It is not rocket science but the current system has not responded.

This is already costed. Rick Wilson, of King Hospital London did the sums for the British Government.

Investment in feeding our children and patients produces enormous savings in the long run.

It saves lives, it makes people healthier and it makes more effective use of the health resources. Last month we proposed a larger plan

'Give the health service breathing

McKEOWN tells ministers it's not rocket science



with some strategic actions for the Executive:

- Give the health service some breathing space by rethinking the budget

- Decide that the only route to long-term health and financial security is to prioritise health inequalities and prevention. A healthier population means less hospital treatment.

- Make the anti-poverty strategy a legal requirement and issue an Executive directive to prioritise the statutory duty on equality. That way we concentrate our efforts into tackling root causes.

The essential building blocks are:

- An effective role for the Ministerial Group on Public Health,

- Stop health commissioning. It distracts Trusts from the core goal. It blurs accountability by creating people to blame and places to hide and it raises administrative costs

- Monitor what is really happening on the ground in primary and secondary care, and mental health.

Some of the changes this leads to are obvious:

- Focus on the NHS as a service delivered predominantly in local communities rather than in hospitals; 90 per cent of health care is delivered in primary care but we still focus the bulk

of our attention to the other 10 per cent.

- Develop options for change with people, not for them.

- Concentrate on the most vulnerable, especially children services and older people with long term needs which should be met at home, not in hospitals

Some are more controversial and challenge vested interests:

- Empower multi-disciplinary teams in community casualty departments to provide the majority of hospital-based unscheduled care, backed by tele-medicine to consultant led emergency units.

- Shorten waiting times by treating day surgery as the norm.

- Concentrate specialised or complex care on fewer sites to secure clinical benefit or manage clinical risk.

- Set a clear agenda for Community Health Partnerships to work across barriers between primary and secondary care and engage with partners in social care to shift the balance of care.

This is too important a challenge to be distracted by party politics or petulance. We are hoping for a serious and positive response from politicians and the health care system alike.

space by rethinking budgets'

This article originally appeared in the Belfast Telegraph

Picture: UNISON

TUC argues for £6 an hour UK minimum wage

THE TUC has called for £6 an hour minimum wage in the UK.

Union officials argued for a 3.5 per cent hike in adult pay at a meeting with the Low Pay Commission on October 30, describing it as an approach that was "both sensible and affordable".

They claimed the 20p rise would deliver a "social justice" premium, and help address the gender gap. It was also pointed out the rise would generate around £400m worth of extra spending as low paid workers tended to spend nearly all their NMW increases in the local economy.

General secretary Brendan Barber said: "It is predictable that some employer groups are saying that any increase in the minimum wage will threaten jobs and that £6 is too much."

"However, raising the minimum wage has already helped thousands of families without causing significant job losses."

"The effect of a further reasonable increase on employer pay bills will be modest, and companies should find them easy to absorb."

"Economic growth is predicted to return during the period that the Low Pay Commission is considering."

"Earnings should grow and unemployment should fall. An increase in the minimum wage is required to ensure that working families are not left in unnecessary poverty."

GRA issues warning notice on pay to Govt

GARDA Representative Association vice-president Damien McCarthy has warned ministers that any attempt to cut officers' pay and allowances would be fiercely resisted.

The GRA, which represents all rank-and-file gardai, is to take part in Congress and Frontline Alliance marches on November 6 and 11.

Mr McCarthy insisted any move by the Government to cut pay would "warrant a response" but added "it will be done within the law".

It is understood current allowances and overtime top up Garda basic pay by nearly 50 per cent.

100 jobs won't offset 'educational vandalism'

A GOVERNMENT commitment to appoint 100 extra secondary school teachers has been slammed as a "gesture" that will not offset the damage being done to educational system.

Jim Moore, spokesperson for the Post-Primary Education Forum, told the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Science that cutbacks were "educational vandalism".

He said: "The PPEF is anxiously awaiting an outline of the exact details of the appointment of 100 teachers. But this is only a gesture and it will not go far in terms of ensuring all of our young people get the education they need."



Campfield: 'Honoured' by vote

Campfield is new NIPSA chief

BRIAN Campfield has been elected the new general secretary of NIPSA, Northern Ireland's largest trade union.

The current deputy general secretary will take over the top post early next year from John Corey when he retires.

Mr Campfield, 56, secured 66% of votes cast against 34% for the other candidate Kieran Bannon.

He has been a NIPSA official since 1982 and earlier this year was elected to the Executive

Council of Congress. Following the result, Mr Campfield said: "I am honoured to have the opportunity to serve NIPSA members as their general secretary."

"I wish to thank sincerely all the members and union branches that supported me."

"I will do my utmost to continue to build NIPSA as a strong effective trade union championing the rights of members in the public service, community and voluntary sector and a

growing number employed by private sector companies."

Outgoing general secretary John Corey said: "The vote for Brian Campfield reflects the confidence of NIPSA members in his commitment and ability to lead the union in the major challenges that lie ahead."

"I know that he will always put the interests of members first and with his experience and skills NIPSA will progress successfully."

LEFT-leaning US website The Huffington Post recently launched an Investigative Fund to hire seasoned journalists laid off or forced to take early retirement as result of the imploding American newspaper industry. The initiative has now been joined by Freedom Journalism School launched by the Institute of Southern Studies. It hopes to train 50 "new media muckrakers" to cover the reporting deficit across the southern United States.

Good jobs 'good for you!'

A STUDY has found that good jobs are good for both workers and companies.

The research, carried out by the New York-based Families and Work Institute, revealed that generally American workers were unhappy with their employment situation and tended to be stressed out, time-strapped and overworked.

This led to damaging consequences for their well being with 28 per cent describing their health as excellent - down six per cent from similar research in 2003.

A total of 41 per cent of employees reported experiencing three or more indicators of stress sometimes, often or very

often. The study also showed that a third of employees have experienced one or more symptoms of clinical depression.

A good place of work was defined by the Institute as offering a climate of trust and respect, learning opportunities, worker autonomy, a better work-life balance, supervisor support as well as economic security.

FWI chief Ellen Galinsky said: "You have to pay attention to the small things, the way people treat each other, whether there are opportunities to learn, whether people's input is asked for and considered."

THE Australian national union federation the ACTU fears time is running out in its battle to persuade politicians not to cave in to demands by big business to slash regulation at the expense of workers' health and safety. ACTU secretary Jeff Lawrence warned draft laws going before the Australian parliament were "about taking away protections and rights for workers, rather than lifting the overall standard".

New report highlights impact of recession

CONGRESS president Jack O'Connor has launched a major new report by UNISON into how the recession has impacted on migrant workers in Northern Ireland.

The report's authors claimed their findings had flagged up three main areas of concern:

- Comments about "local jobs for local people" had soared with 77% of migrant workers believing they are more likely to lose their jobs than local employees,

- That immigration restrictions – such as work permit regulations – made migrant workers more vulnerable to the threat of losing their jobs, and

- The research gathered in April indicated that workplace racism predated the slump and remains a major problem – particularly in the private sector with 54% of respondents reporting they had been personally exposed to racism at work.

A staggering 80% of migrant workers in the private sector reported being "humiliated, bullied or discriminated" while at work with many feeling they had come under disproportionate scrutiny from managers. One respondent commented: "They can notice your smallest mistake".

Also when migrant workers challenged racist incidents, 51% were satisfied with their employer's response in the NHS, against 40% in the private care sector

Nathalie Donnelly, UNISON local organiser, said: "This report highlights the worrying levels of racism in the private care sector.

"These findings should send alarm bells ringing. However it is not enough to blame a few bad employers; without statutory restrictions – on their right to work and live here, or on access social protection – migrant workers would be far less likely to face discrimination and racism without being able to challenge it."

Anti-racism drive takes message to workplace

EQUALITY Commission Northern Ireland chief Evelyn Collins has thanked the many organisations, firms and trade unions that took part in last month's Anti-Racist Workplace Week.

She said: "We were delighted that many of Northern Ireland's leading employers, trade unions and representative organisations registered their participation with us and supported the campaign's anti-racism message.

"This year's campaign had added poignancy. The racially motivated attacks over the summer which saw Roma and Polish people fleeing their homes was a stark reminder that racism persists in our community.

"It is important that people have the opportunity to voice their opposition to racism, and although Anti-Racist Workplace Week was primarily aimed at employees and employers, it's hope its message travelled beyond the workplace into the local communities in which they operate."

Translink, one of Northern Ireland's largest employers, hosted the October 19 launch of the week's activities in Belfast's Central Station.

Group CEO Catherine Mason said the firm was delighted to be involved in the campaign and was committed to creating a "harmonious working environment" where employees and passengers were treated with "respect and dignity". She added: "As an employer we strive to ensure all forms of harassment, including racism,

are removed from the workplace."

The Equality Commission, which runs the workplace initiative each year, seeks to raise awareness and encourage employers to develop strategies on equal opportunity and inclusivity on the shopfloor.

Leading retailers IKEA, Tesco and Co-op also distributed leaflets and informed their staff about the campaign.

This year's campaign featured numerous events and activities. Events with a trade union input included:

- A Congress-organised seminar on the theme of 'The Rise of the Right and Migration in Europe' held at Newry Canal Hotel on October 19.

- A NASUWT-run anti-racism workshop for its members on October 21.

- A roundtable meeting with ETUC general secretary John Monks, local trade unionists and politicians at the Europa Hotel on October 22.

- Launch of 'Same Job, Same Pay, Same Status!' leaflet at UNITE offices in Belfast on October 23, and

- Launch of new report 'Migrant Workers, Racism and the Recession' at meeting of UNISON's Regional Council on October 23.

Further information on Anti-Racism Workplace Week can be found online at www.equalityni.org



Collins: Delighted



Lubow Kulbabczuk, Maria Matyusova, Lilla Fulop and Ewa Kulbabczuk benefited from a basic English course organised by employers IKEA with Belfast Metropolitan College



Congress' Jack O'Connor at launch of UNISON report

UNITE warns of 'two-tier workforce'

UNITE has warned of a "two-tier" workforce developing in Northern Ireland with agency workers – mainly migrants – employed on less favourable conditions than other employees.

Speaking at the launch of a new series of anti-racist leaflets in eight languages, regional secretary Jimmy Kelly said: "Many of these workers are recruited in their country of origin where they sign up to contracts they don't fully understand.

"They are also constructed to thwart any attempts to establish fundamental rights by putting at risk not only jobs but also their homes in this country."

He said the union noted the increasing "use and abuse" of agency labour within the local food industry. Evidence revealed by UNITE included:

- Workers classed as temporary having with up to five years continuous employment,
- Lower hourly rates than the directly employed workers,
- Fewer holidays than the directly employed workers,
- No overtime rates, and
- No shift allowances.

Mr Kelly continued: "In addition, they are expected to accept long hours, unreasonable productivity demands, general harassment and lack of job security.

"In our view this is clear evidence that employers consider migrant workers to be less equal than local workers."

He said this evidence was in the main backed by research carried out under the auspices of The Ethical Trading Initiative.

As a result the Equality and Human Rights Commission for England and Wales has launched a further probe into the UK meat industry.

Mr Kelly said: "We are again confi-

dent this report, which is due by the end of this year, will support our experiences on the ground in workplaces throughout Ireland and the UK.

"The leaflets we are launching tell the story of how these workers feel – real people, in real situations caught between exploitation by their employer and the perception of other workers who see them as a threat.

"A perception – we would argue – that goes largely unchallenged."

He asked why the media did not ask questions of local employers why they paid one group of workers less than another group of workers.

In the absence of this short of challenge, the perception grew that migrant workers want to work for less, adding "nothing could be further from the truth".

Mr Kelly called on employers to stop exploiting vulnerable workers and called on the Government to pass "legislation with teeth" to ban such practices.

He said: "Northern Ireland was at the forefront of establishing progressive policies on fair employment.

"We now need our Assembly to pass legislation ensuring equality of opportunity for migrant and all workers in Northern Ireland."

Mr Kelly noted that many employers had signed up to the Equality Commission's Anti-Racism Workplace Week.

He added: "However, the test of fairness and equality is not what employers are prepared to sign, but what actions they take to remove exploitation from their workplaces.

"We all have a responsibility to help generate a more tolerant and civil society but those who are in a position of power and influence have the greatest responsibility.

"It's time they exercised it."

Pictures: Equality Commission NI, UNISON

Warning on workplace deaths

THE FIRST of November marked the 20th anniversary of the introduction of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act.

The 1989 Act ensured that for the first time in the Republic occupational safety and health legislation covered 100 per cent of workers and workplaces.

Before this, it is estimated only one in five employees – working mainly in factories, building sites, mines and quarries – were covered.

While acknowledging the significance of the anniversary, SIPTU health and safety advisor Sylvester Cronin warned there was still an "unacceptably high rate" of deaths in Irish workplaces.

He said: "Unfortunately, there is very little cause for celebration as workers continue to be killed in Irish workplaces at an unacceptably high

rate. In the past 20 years, more than 1,200 workers have been killed needlessly in Irish workplaces as a result of preventable accidents.

"Some international bodies, such as the ILO and European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA), have estimated the overall levels of worker-deaths are many multiples higher when work-related illnesses and diseases are taken into account."

Figures contained in the ILO's 'Decent Work, Safe Work' Report in 2001 estimated the annual work-related mortality rate at 1,298. In 2003, the EU-OSHA produced figures that indicated that Irish work-related deaths stood at 1,413.

Mr Cronin said: "If these figures are representative of the real situation relating to occupational safety and health we are possibly looking at a

total of somewhere in excess of 21,000 work-related deaths in Ireland over the last 20 years.

"The cornerstone of preventing these massive work-related deaths is to have effective written risk assessments, as is the legal obligation in Ireland and throughout the EU.

"It is almost self-evident that employers are not carrying out their legal obligations. Instead, within the EU, there are efforts afoot to reduce this legal obligation to carry out 'life and limb' saving written risk assessments.

"There is no case, business, social or moral, to reduce the requirements for written risk assessments."

He added: "SIPTU calls on the Irish Government and MEPs to resist and oppose such a move at European level."

Barber in pensions blast

TUC chief Brendan Barber has accused private sector employers in the UK of "walking away" from providing good pensions.

He made the claim in reaction to new figures released by the Office for National Statistics which showed nine million people paid into an occupational pension last year.

But general secretary Brendan Barber warned these findings did not include Group Personal Pensions and Stakeholder Pensions that have employer contributions.

He said: "Private sector employers are increasingly choosing such schemes over trust based occupational defined contribution schemes. These can still be good pensions but do not show up in these statistics. But even on

the most generous definition more than 60 per cent of the private sector workforce are not saving in an employer supported pension, and are likely to face poverty in retirement.

"Private sector employers have walked away from providing good pensions for their workforce."

Predicting the new figures would renew "politics of envy attacks" on public sector pensions, Mr Barber added: "The real pensions crisis is in the private sector, where gold-plated boardroom pensions are boosted by taxpayers while growing numbers of ordinary workers get nothing.

"It's time to start levelling up rather than attacking the pensions of hard working vital public servants.

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MEPs back Congress call on EU trade talks

TWELVE Irish MEPs have backed Congress chief David Begg's call for a suspension of talks on a Free Trade Agreement between the EU and Colombia.

Ireland is the first EU country in which all its representatives at the European Parliament have taken a united position on the issue.

They co-signed a letter to EU Trade Commissioner Baroness Ashton asking her to suspend the negotiations.

Welcoming the move, Mr Begg said the "atrocious" human rights record in Colombia has to be addressed.

He added: "The proposed Free Trade Agreement would give special trade benefits to a government that has repeatedly failed to implement

their international obligations including basic human and trade union rights. Ireland is the only country in the EU where we have united all the elected representatives in the European Parliament behind this important demand.

"We are also calling for the launch of an open EU investigation into Colombia's labour and human rights performance."

Assassinations of trade unionists in Colombia continue at a rate unseen anywhere else in the world. According to figures supplied by the International Trade Union Confederation, of 76 trade unionists murdered in 2008, 49 were Colombians.

Nearly 30 trade union activists have already been killed this year.

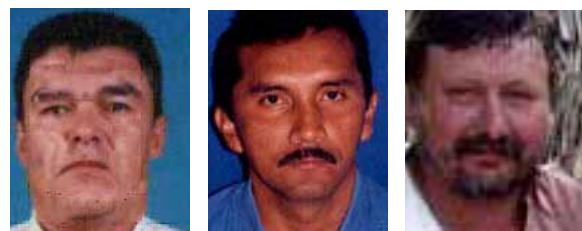
Those responsible for the murders – some-

times including members of the state security forces – continue to act with almost complete impunity.

Similar trade agreements between Colombia and Canada, Colombia and the EFTA group of countries and Colombia and the US have been delayed over human rights concerns.

President Obama has cited anti-trade union attacks as the principle reason for his opposition to the deal. Mr Begg added: "It must be made clear to the Colombian regime that the EU and its member states do not condone the current situation in the country.

"Therefore the EU Free Trade Agreement negotiations with Colombia have to be suspended immediately."



Colombian health workers' union member Jorge Prieto, Leonel Goyeneche, of the Colombian Trade Union Confederation and National Association of Peasant Consumers leader Héctor Alirio Martínez murdered in Saravena on August 5, 2004. It is claimed their killers were members of the "Gabriel Revés Pizarro" Battalion, attached to the XVIII Brigade of the Colombian Army

Pictures: Amnesty International

Where death stalks the organisers



Vanegas: Support

JUSTICE for Colombia is a trade union network campaigning for human rights, workers' rights and the search for peace with social justice in Colombia.

Set up by a group of British trade unionists in 2002, JFC was a response to the appalling human rights crisis in Colombia.

The Irish branch of JFC was established in December last year with SIPTU's Mick Dowling as chairperson and Mairtin Mac-Maolain, of ASTI, as vice chair.

Since then JFC-Ireland has held public meetings in Dublin, Belfast, Wexford and Galway.

Today more than 100 Irish trade union-

ists are involved in the network. JFC has also done much work in lobbying the Irish Government and Irish MEPs against EU's preferential trade agreement with Colombia.

Luis Alberto Vanegas, the Colombian Trade Union Congress' human rights director, was invited by JFC-Ireland and ICTU Global Solidarity programme to speak at Congress' biennial delegate conference in July.

He told 800 delegates and observers of the grim reality on the ground for trade unionists in Colombia where 49 activists were murdered last year.

He pointed out that members of teach-

ers' unions were often targeted and spoke of the deaths of two teachers only weeks before.

Welcoming the setting up of JFC-Ireland, he underlined the need for solidarity work within trade unions worldwide.

He told delegates it was of the utmost importance to open an EU probe into Colombia's labour and human rights record and to press home to the Colombian government how unacceptable this was.

Mr Vanegas also asked for ongoing talks on a bilateral free trade agreement between EU and Colombia to be stopped until its government complied with the basic conventions on human rights and labour standards.

Colombian President Alvaro Uribe has claimed security is improving in his country but this is not reflected in the grim statistics – with a 25 per cent rise in the number of killings last year. ITUC general secretary Guy Ryder claimed the authorities were "at best, incapable of ensuring protection and in some cases are complicit".

● If you want to get involved in the campaign, contact ICTU Global Solidarity Officer Stellan Hermansson; Tel: 01 889 77 04 or stellan.hermansson@ictu.ie.

Justice for Colombia - key aims

1. To provide concrete support to trade unions and other civil society organisations in Colombia in their struggle for human and trade union rights
2. To campaign against the systematic human rights abuses carried out against trade unionists and other civil society activists in Colombia and to highlight the regular collusion between the Colombian state security forces and illegal paramilitary groups and the impunity which the

- perpetrators benefit from
3. To support and promote a peaceful politically negotiated settlement to the conflict in Colombia
4. To insist that UN and ILO conventions and recommendations are implemented in Colombia in both law and practice

www.justiceforcolombia.org
www.ictu.ie/globalsolidarity

Our dispute is part of wider struggle on public services

EVERY worker, every trade union should be speaking out in support of the postal workers.

The dispute is complicated, but the issues driving the recent flurry of work stoppages are familiar to workers everywhere.

● Low pay: Postal workers in Britain earn an average of £380 a week and badly need the opportunities for overtime and working on rest-days now being unilaterally withdrawn by management.

● Work intensification: Since the 2007 strike Royal Mail (postal service) management has imposed what the union claims are "unagreed and unachievable" workloads.

● Job losses: Since 2004, following deregulation of the postal "market", more than 60,000 jobs have gone, leaving those remaining working harder and harder.

● Reports of bullying and intimidation of workers to meet increasing workloads.

In 2007, postal workers took national strike action over similar issues, which were resolved by an agreement that cut a significant number of jobs. In return workers were promised a four-day week without loss of pay. Yet in the following two years Royal Mail management has simply broken this agreement, "reverting" workers, particularly in London, back to five-day weeks without consultation.

But now the kind of work overload disguised within teamworking is back.

Royal Mail calls it "absorption," meaning, according to one London representative: "You've got to take on someone else's round at no extra pay – if someone can't do their round for whatever reason, their work is just 'absorbed' into yours." Deregulation is forcing Royal Mail



Belfast posties on the picket line last month

Picture: Brazier Media

to struggle with a far from level playing field, as rivals like TNT, Europe's second-biggest parcel company, cream off major contracts and leave Royal Mail with what is known as the "final mile" – the local delivery which only RM is in a position to carry out.

The only group to benefit from all this, predictably, is top management, with Royal Mail boss Adam Crozier pocketing a £3m bonus last year. Most scandalous of all is the debacle of the postal workers' pension.

A 13-year pension "holiday" in which management stopped paying into the pension plan, has led to a pension fund deficit of £10m plus. Many postal workers now face ending their working lives with NO pension scheme at all.

The current strike is seen as the only way

postal workers can stave off the voracious agenda of the Government and Royal Mail.

Referring to the 2007 strike, a workplace rep said: "We had Royal Mail, and we let it go... We've got to win this strike, we've got to establish basic trade union rights on representation and negotiation, otherwise this will never be over."

This dispute is part of a much bigger battle over public services, jobs, union rights and pay and conditions at work. That's what makes this dispute and public support for the posties so vital.

A victory for the posties would boost the morale of every trade unionist fighting cuts to jobs and the rowing back on terms and conditions.

Each month The Union Post features stories and campaigns from Amnesty International files...



Still no justice for acid-attack activist

KONSTANTINA Kuneva, right, was attacked in Athens in December last year by unknown men. They threw sulphuric acid in her face, leaving her blinded in one eye and with serious damage to her throat and stomach. The attack is thought to be linked to her role as a trade unionist.

Konstantina first came to Greece from Bulgaria, starting work as a cleaner and soon becoming involved in trade unionism.

As Secretary of the Attica Union of Cleaners she has defended migrant workers against exploitation and is fighting for better conditions and pay. Tensions between herself and her employers had been escalating ahead of the attack, with her shifts moved to unfavourable hours, pressure to quit and threatening phone calls.

Yet despite this, and the viciousness with which Konstantina was attacked, it is claimed the police investigation has been hopelessly inadequate and has overlooked

her role as a trade unionist focusing instead on Konstantina's private life. Her lawyers say the examination of the crime scene was cursory at best and the testimony of witnesses other than Konstantina herself wasn't investigated further. There are now fears that the case will be closed before her attackers have been identified.

In June this year, the 'judge investigator' assigned to the case decided to end the investigation, even though the attackers have not been found. The case was sent to the Prosecutor, who can decide to close the case or send it back for further investigation.

Amnesty International is demanding that the case is kept open and properly investigated, and that trade unionists and other human rights defenders are properly protected by the Greek authorities.

The Global ITUC has also taken up her case.



Picture: Amnesty International

Join in the campaign and send a message of solidarity to Konstantina at www.amnesty.org.uk/gcc



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